

Young Adults Literature and Graphic Novels as Agents of Change in Adolescents and Young adults

Minor Research Project – Executive Summary

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Young Adults Literature is a rather recently emerged literary genre which acts as transitional phase between children's literature and what is commonly referred to as literature. Usually boys and girls in the age group of 13 – 21 are considered as young adults. This period is very crucial in the overall development of an individual. The early expressions of young adult literature can be seen in the novels like Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Rabindranath Tagore's "The Postmaster" (1890), Antoine de Saint-Expéry's *The Little Prince* (1943), J D Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954). Nineteenth century novels like *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), *Waverley* (1814), *Oliver Twist* (1838), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), *Great Expectations* (1860), *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *Kidnapped* (1886), and *Moonfleet* (1898) also fall into this list. But what makes these novels and short fiction different from today's Young Adults Literature is the fact that though they deal with adolescent life, their target audience was the adult society. They were made and circulated for the adults readers.

The history of modern Young Adults literature can be traced back to the publication of the American novel, *The Outsiders* (1967) by Susan E Hinton. The novel portrayed a truer and darker side of adolescent life of the period. The novel was written during the high school days of the writer and published when she was seventeen. The succeeding decades witnessed the unprecedented growth and expansion of young adults fiction. The popular successes of J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunter Games* trilogy, Stephenie Meyer's *The Twilight Saga* reinforce the potential presence of young adults literature in the western literary scenario.

Indian literature also has proved to be a fertile soil for the growth of Young Adults Literature. Though some short fictions of Rabindranath Tagore like "The Postmaster" and R K Narayan's *Swamy and*

Friends have dealt with adolescent life, the target audience, as in the case of western literature, is the rest of the society. The instant popularity of the novels of Chetan Bhagat has opened up the era of Young Adults literature in India. Devika Rangachari's *Growing Up* (2002), Paro Anand's *No Guns at my Son's Funeral* (2006), Deepa Agarwal's historical adventure *Caravan to Tibet* (2008), Siddhartha Sarma's *The Grasshopper's Run* (2009) etc have become landmarks in the Indian Young Adults Literature.

The adolescent experiences and perspectives in the age of supermodernity are ontologically different from those who lived in the premodern and modern age. The introduction of the new technologies of information, the urgencies of Globalization and the development of global consumerism – all have reconfigured all levels of social and individual interactions. The ever expanding internet and mobile networks has problematized cultural and emotional existence of people. Life in this age has become as enigmatic and bewildering as a labyrinth. Growing up in the labyrinth is not an easy business. It is perhaps the young adults who struggle hard to cope with the present reality. Young Adults Literature most often addresses such issues faced by the teenagers. S K Herz and D K Gallo, two researchers in the field have identified the following salient features of young adult fiction:

- The main characters are teenagers.
- The point of view is most often first person, and it is usually that of a teenager.
- The narrator is most often the main character.
- The language and vocabulary are typical of contemporary teenagers
- The setting is most often contemporary, but also can be historical, futuristic (as in science fiction), or imaginative (as in fantasy).
- The books contain characters and issues to which teenagers can relate.
- In a majority of the books, parents play a minor role.
- The plot and literary style are uncomplicated but never simplistic.
- The outcome of the story is usually dependent upon the decisions and actions of the main character.
- With the exception of complicated plotting, all the traditional literary elements typical of classical literature are present in most contemporary novels for young adults—well-rounded characters, flashbacks, foreshadowing, allusions, irony, metaphorical language—though they are used less frequently and at less sophisticated levels to match the experiential levels of readers.
- The very best YAL books can be as appealing to adult readers as they are to teens.

These characteristics reveal the complexity of YAL and just how difficult it is to define this genre in simple terms. Despite the variety of content and styles it encompasses, YAL does serve a significant purpose: it offers a transition from children's literature into the world of adult literature.

Another recently emerged genre of fiction is the Graphic Novel, which is an extension of comics. It includes sequential art, comics, photo-novels, graphics and paperback comics novels. They have become a major part of popular culture in the first part of the 21st century. More books, films, articles, and websites related to sequential art are being produced than ever before. In fact, in a world that is going more and more with digital content, graphic novels are one of the last varieties of the printed form that are gaining in popularity as each year goes by.

The Pedagogical Implications of Young Adults Literature and Graphic Novels.

The school / college curricula of India have not yet been free from the influence of the Great tradition of the Leavisites. The barrier between high culture and popular culture still exists in the process of curriculum design and selection of text books and designing the syllabi for English and regional languages in India. On moral and ethical grounds, this is justifiable to a certain extent. India is a multicultural and multiethnic country where it is almost impossible to develop a uniform and homogeneous popular culture. Moreover, the Indian youth lack emotional and sexual maturity. The Great tradition which aims to inculcate the values of Englishness and ethics among the young generation of England has been accepted as the norm ever since the colonial period.

Family, friendship, teenage love, adventure, fantasy, technological advancement etc are some of the favourite themes of young adults literature. Most of the stories deal with a young adult hero freeing himself from a dominating situation. Graphic novels also play an important role in developing language skills. Dialogues and conversations in graphic novels and comics, enable the readers to grasp the native speaker's use of language. The introduction of young adult fiction and graphic novels in the curricula can enhance the students' interest in language learning.